

MANAGING SOFT OUTCOMES

**A Resource Package to Assist Organisations to Develop
an Evidence Based Approach to Managing Outcomes**

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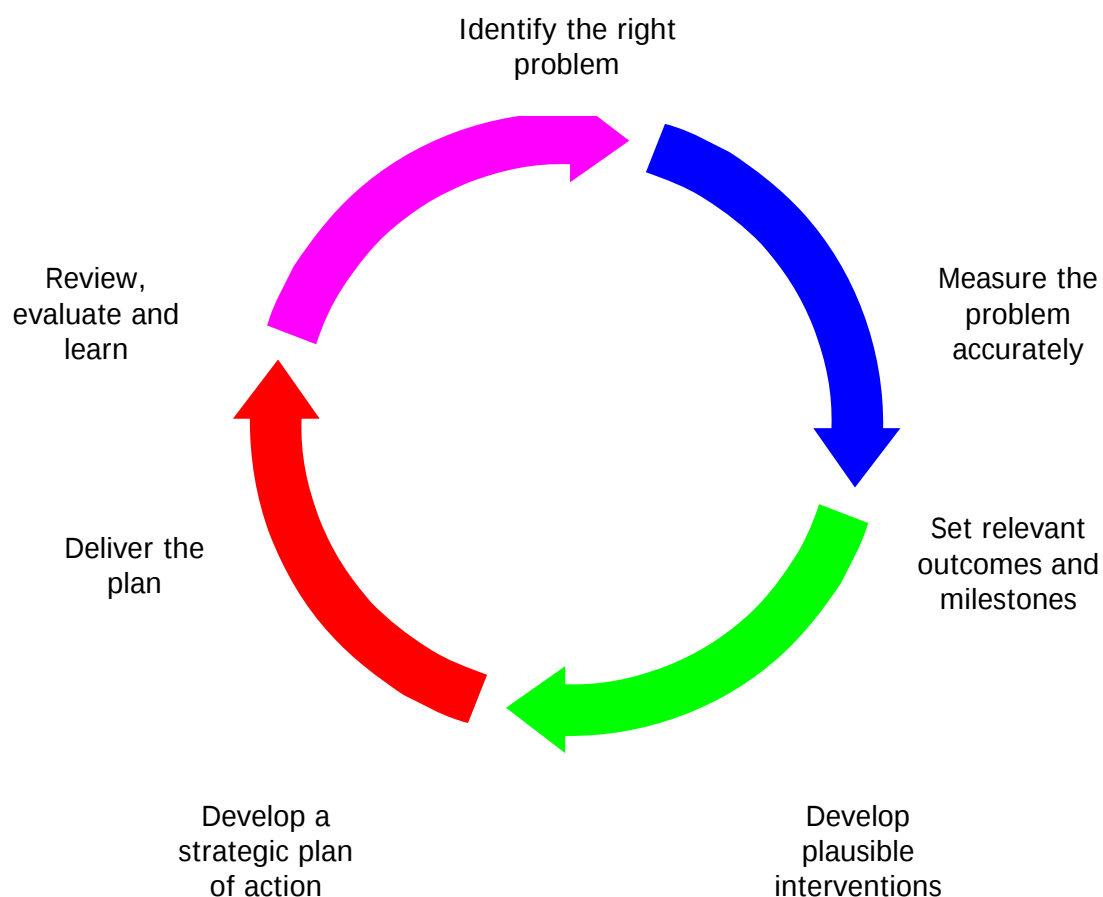
Introduction

The aim of this package is to enable organisations and projects to work through a process that will enable them to develop a custom tool for recording and demonstrating soft outcomes.

The resources contained in this package lay the foundations for creating a system to develop, manage and evidence outcomes. These materials have been compiled and developed from a 2-day training programme and accompany [Soft Outcomes: A Shared Approach](#), a guide developed and published by [Equal Brighton & Hove](#).

This guide originated from [research](#) into the different ways that outcomes, and particularly 'soft' outcomes, are surfaced, developed and evidenced, and then used to guide the processes of change and development in working with people and communities.

The following diagram demonstrated how to adopt an evidence based approach (adapted from [Renewal.net](#)):



1. WHAT IS OUR SHARED UNDERSTANDING?

EXERCISE: The aim of this exercise is to ensure that all members of the organisation/project have a shared understanding, and use, of the terminology involved with managing outcomes. We need to make sure we are speaking the same language to develop a better system.

Look at the terms:

Barrier, Bias, Hard Outcomes, Hard Skills, Indicators, Inputs, Norms, Outcomes, Outputs, Skills, SMART, Soft Indicators, Soft Outcomes, Soft Skills

In 3s or 4s discuss and match the term to its descriptor. Follow up with discussion to confirm meanings and alleviate any misconception. **Refer to completed table on the following page afterwards.**

TERM	DESCRIPTOR
	A judgement that leans in a particular direction
	Abilities and competencies associated with performing technical and tangible tasks
	Abilities and competencies usually associated with people (social and personal)
	Abilities or competencies that can be consistently performed
	Achievements which may indicate acquisition or progress towards an outcome
	Activities, services or 'finished goods'
	Broadly accepted standards, patterns or types
	Changes or that have taken place usually associated with something physical, technical or intellectual
	Changes or benefits that occur as a result of an activity
	Changes or benefits that occur that are usually associated with people, relationships and groups
	Evidence of progress (steps) towards or achievement of an outcome
	Keeping outcomes specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timebound.
	Something which prevents or limits a person's access
	The resources required to deliver an activity

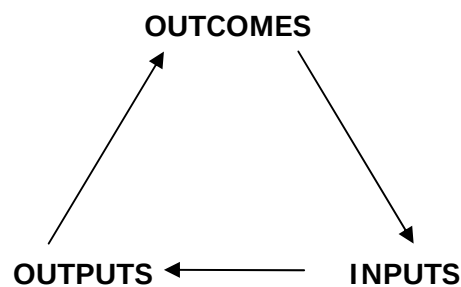
Terms and their associated descriptors:

TERM	DESCRIPTOR
Barrier	Something which prevents or limits a person's access
Bias	A judgement that leans in a particular direction
Hard outcomes	Changes or benefits that have taken place usually associated with something physical, technical or intellectual
Hard skills	Abilities and competencies associated with performing technical and tangible tasks
Indicators	Evidence of progress (steps) towards or achievement of an outcome
Inputs	The resources required to deliver an activity
Norms	Broadly accepted standards, patterns or types
Outcomes	Changes or benefits that occur as a result of an activity
Outputs	Activities, services or 'finished goods'
Skills	Abilities or competencies that can be consistently performed
SMART Outcomes	Keeping outcomes specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timebound.
Soft Indicators	Achievements which may indicate acquisition or progress towards an outcome
Soft outcomes	Changes or benefits that occur that are usually associated with people, relationships and groups
Soft Skills	Abilities and competencies usually associated with people (social and personal)

2. HOW DO WE START THINKING ABOUT OUTCOMES?

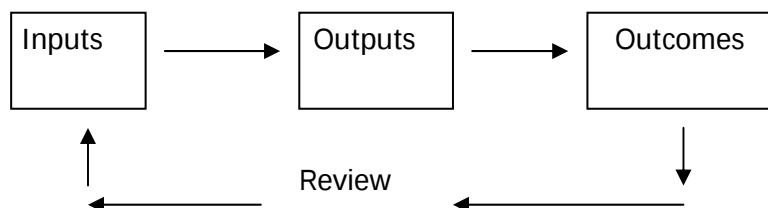
EXERCISE: Read the information below. What are your organisation's/project's inputs, outputs and outcomes? How are they linked? How do you plan for these outcomes? How could you plan differently to attain better outcomes?

There is a constant relationship between **inputs** (what resources, people, technology or good will that goes into a project); **outputs** (what your project does with its resources and what it 'produces'); and **outcomes** (what is changed or improved – the effect that the outputs have on the things you are trying to achieve).



So often project planning starts with inputs and trying to get hold of resources to do things. This is the wrong way round. Planning a good project requires you to start with the outcome and ask yourself what you are trying to achieve. Then, in turn, plan the resources you need (inputs) and the way that you will deploy these resources (the outputs). Of course you do not start with a blank sheet of paper in real life, but it is always necessary to focus on what you are trying change and improve, and not just what services you are trying to deliver.

Outputs are about 'doing the things right' and using your resources properly. Outcomes are about making sure you are 'doing the right things'.

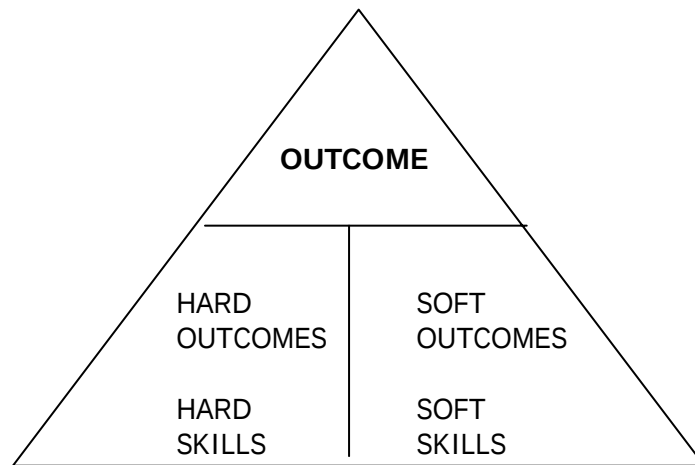


For instance, over many decades we (in the UK) institutionalised thousands of people with learning disabilities and mental health problems. Huge resources were put into maintaining people for a lifetime in these 'homes'. Many of them were nice places and well run – they 'did things right' (i.e. good **outputs**)

However institutionalisation on such a large scale did not 'do the right things' (i.e. produce good **outcomes** or the right outcomes). It did not provide the best, most effective (or for that matter efficient) way of supporting and nourishing the people involved. These institutions up and down the country were **output** driven and neglected starting from an **outcome** perspective by asking the questions – what do we want to achieve?; what do we want to change with the people we are working with? Eventually alternative ways were found of supporting people in community settings.

3. WHAT ARE OUTCOMES?

Outcomes are changes or benefits that occur as a result of an activity. They can be hard measures or soft measures and can include hard skills or soft skills.



Often the attainment of positive outcomes for people involves both a 'soft' and a 'hard' element. For instance enabling someone to complete a course or therapeutic programme might involve the 'hard' outcome of completing a course, learning new skills or getting a qualification. But as important, if not far more important for many people, is the improvement or acquisition of 'soft outcomes' or 'soft skills'. That is soft outcomes such as feeling more confident or more capable and soft skills such as communication, personal presentation or personal organisation.

So planning and targeting better outcomes when working with people can involve 'hard' and 'soft' elements. Very often, achieving hard outcomes is completely dependent upon soft outcomes and soft skills.

EXERCISE: Read the following project example below and answer these questions: what are the most appropriate outputs required to design into a project to meet the outcomes? Which are hard outcomes and which are soft outcomes? What approach is required to meet soft and hard outcomes?

Training and employment project for homeless people

Outcomes - Homeless people gain in self-confidence and acquire new skills/qualifications or secure a job.

Inputs - Outreach workers provided in order to recruit people to the scheme; skilled trainers required for delivering one-to-one support and group training sessions; and premises needed for providing the service.

Outputs - What are the most appropriate outputs required to design into a project to meet the outcomes? (this could specify a number of interventions, over a specific time-frame, with a target number and might include: one-to-one support sessions, group training sessions, volunteering, peer support/learning/training provided, taster courses, personal development courses or action learning programmes)

4. WHICH SKILLS ARE “SOFT” SKILLS?

EXERCISE: The idea of this exercise is to identify which terms are soft skills, and which terms refer to some other attribute. The learning strategies that need to be deployed in order to develop these skills are many and various.

This is a list of skills commonly referred to as “soft”, and was taken from a wide range of sources including the NOCN, QCA, DWP, IES, DfEE, DfES, various papers, reports, and websites (thanks to [Simon Simpson](#) for his research in compiling this list).

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| • Communication | • Problem Solving | • Appearance |
| • Non-verbal communication | • Learning | • Recognising Prior Skills |
| • Oral Communication | • Time Keeping / Punctuality | • Responsibility |
| • Application of Number | • Listening | • Personal and Career Aspirations |
| • IT/ICT | • Responding | • Attendance and Punctuality |
| • Working With Others | • Assertiveness | • Personal Hygiene |
| • Improving Own Learning and Performance | • Negotiation | • Self Awareness |
| • Problem Solving | • Anger Management | • Health and Fitness |
| • Verbal Communication | • Thinking Rationally | • Concentration and Engagement |
| • Motivation | • Setting Goals | • Abilities to complete forms, write a CV, and manage money |
| • Confidence / Self-confidence | • Personal Development | • Awareness of rights and responsibilities |
| • Time Management | • Confronting and Managing Fear | • Respect |
| • Self Management | • Managing Stress | • Self Respect |
| • Team Work | • Initiative and Enterprise | • Literacy |
| • Planning and Organising | • Caring for myself (psychologically) | • Numeracy |
| | • Managing Relationships | |

Note down on the list some answers to the following, two questions:

1) Which are soft skills and which are not soft skills?

2) If they are not soft skills then what are they?

5. KEEPING OUTCOMES SMART

Often voluntary organisations, community projects, and public services are asked to produce what are called SMART targets. The idea is a checking device for determining whether your outputs and outcomes are workable.

The target should be:

S	Specific
M	Measurable
A	Achievable
R	Relevant
T	Timely

- **specific:** clear, unambiguous and easy to understand by those who are required to achieve them
- **measurable:** setting a target for which success can be gauged by referring to a specific measure or measures – these can be qualitative or quantitative in nature
- **achievable:** expressing specific aims that staff feel can realistically be achieved, with some effort: 'out of reach, but not out of sight'
- **relevant:** to those who will be required to meet them and relevant to the problem; they must have enough control over their work to be able to meet their targets, or their motivation will suffer plus relevant to the problem you are trying to solve
- **timely:** there should be a set time-scale for achieving a target; open-ended targets may not encourage focused effort on improving performance.

EXERCISE: This exercise is designed to help you locate what kind of outcomes (SMART outcomes or otherwise) your organisation or project is currently working towards by asking the question 'What do you do now?'.

Identify in the left column what you are doing now and then in the right column note down what your organisation or project could be doing to ensure that the outcomes are SMART.

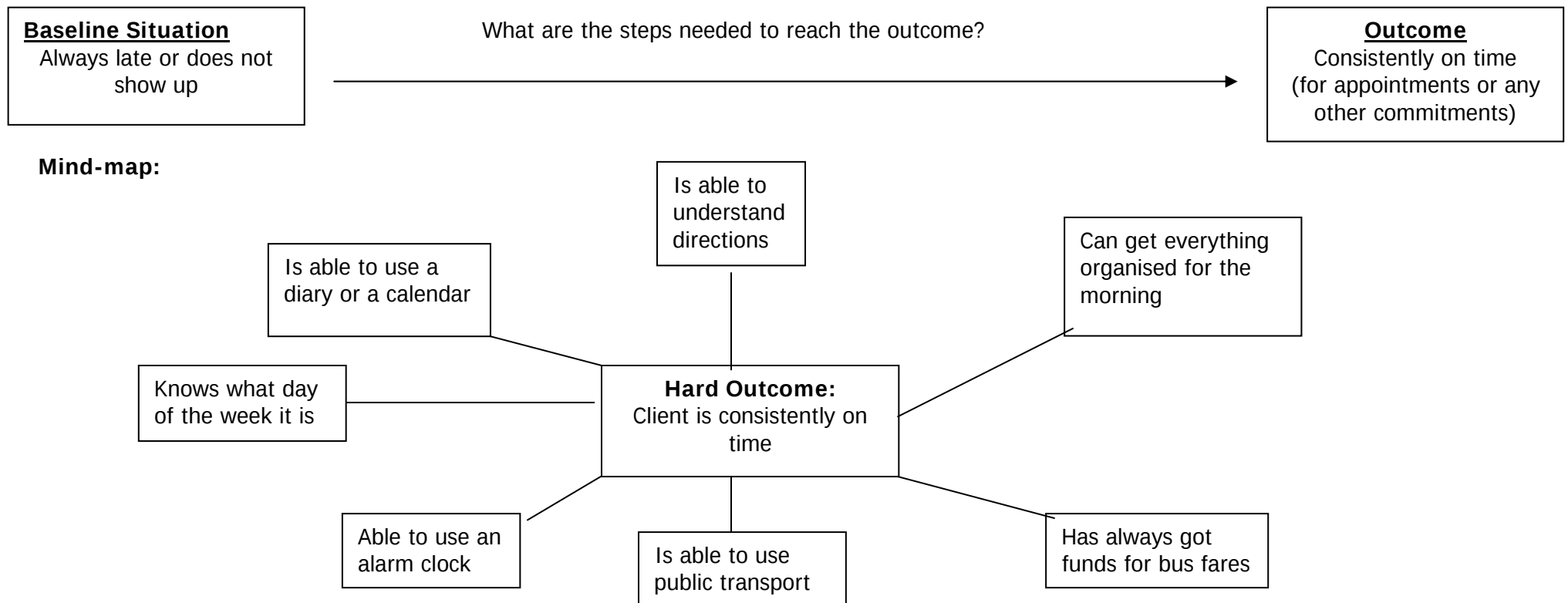
Specific Measurable Achievable Relevant Timebound

What do you do now?	What could you do?

6. HOW DO WE IDENTIFY INDICATORS?

EXERCISE: From your project identify an outcome that you are working towards and a baseline position/situation; this is the position at which a client may be at when your work with them begins. Identify the identifying factors that are needed for that client to achieve (or make progress towards) the outcome in terms of qualitative and quantitative data (e.g. observations, interviews, tests, etc). Try representing this as a mind-map as below. Once you have completed this step you might want to think about identifying factors (indicators) that should be given more weight or are more important in terms of working towards your outcome, and whether they are quantitative or qualitative in nature.

“Time Keeping Example”



6. HOW DO WE RECORD INFORMATION?

We've been through a process to identify baselines, indicators, and outcomes.

Different outcomes, and the nature of whether you are using qualitative or quantitative indicators will affect the methods by which you can best collect information for your project or programme.

So how might you go about collecting and recording evidence systematically? What methods could you use? The link below takes you to one web-based resource on outcomes management that includes a discussion of methods of collecting evidence.

EXERCISE: Go to the link below.

http://www.esf.gov.uk/_docs/distance%5B1%5D.pdf

Page 13 has a list describing different methods of collecting evidence. Consider which method(s) are possible methods of data collection for your outcome(s), and drawbacks of these possible methods (including reliability, ease of collection, ease of recording, etc).

7. EXAMPLES OF TOOLS FOR MEASURING OUTCOMES

Below are three examples of systems other organisations have used for managing, developing and evidencing outcomes. They include various forms, tools, grids and recording methods.

The Outcomes Star is particularly good for using as a development tool with people in terms of developing confidence, motivation and communications. Bear in mind that these tools have been developed out of many hours of work and that they will almost certainly have to be adapted if they are to be used 'wholesale' for other projects or programmes.

EXERCISE: Consider the merits of the following tools in terms of how applicable they are to your target group(s), how you might collect data relating to them, and how this data might be used.

The SOUL Record

<http://www.theresearchcentre.co.uk/soul/Documents/The%20SOUL%20Record%20-%20A%20New%20Tool%20For%20Measuring%20Soft%20Outcomes.pdf>

Catching Confidence

(look at the grids that are contained on pages 62+)

<http://www.niace.org.uk/funds/ACLF/Catching-Confidence-Final-Report.pdf>

The Outcomes Star

<http://www.homelessoutcomes.org.uk/resources/1/OutcomesStar/OutcomesStar.pdf>

8. MAPPING OUTCOMES

This exercise draws together outcomes management and development holistically.

EXERCISE:

- 1) Identify the main aim of your project as briefly as possible.
- 2) Note down the outcomes that are being worked towards at the three different levels of project worker, project or department and the organisation. Some of the outcomes will be the same at different levels.
- 3) Identify for which stakeholder the outcome is being worked on. This will affect how you go about reporting the evidence and how you design and develop your service or project.

Is there clarity between the different levels of the organisation? Are all the stakeholders getting their needs for positive outcomes attended to and are their needs and wants compatible? Are outcomes driven by the needs of your staff, clients or communities?

In groups or pairs evaluate the extent to which the full picture of outcomes is appropriate to the aims and goals of the organisation and where new or changed outcomes need to be developed.

What outcomes are we working towards?				
Main Aim of the Project Is:				
Level	Baseline and outcome descriptors	For which stake-holders (✓)		
		Client	Funder	Other
Project worker Level				
Project or Department Level				
Organisational level				

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Thanks to [Simon Simpson](#) (Simon Simpson Consulting) whose research [*The Measurement and Recognition of Soft Skills: Developing a Common Standard?*](#) assisted the development of this resource pack.